



Al-Risala 1994

August-September

A New India is Emerging

As we near the end of the twentieth century, India's condition would appear in certain significant ways to resemble what it was at the beginning of the century. At that time the country was ripe for revolutions, and by turning the prevailing circumstances to good account, Mahatma Gandhi was able to bestow upon India the gift of peaceful freedom. At the present time the country is again ready for a revolution – a revolution for which we have all been waiting for the last fifty years, namely, the construction of a developed and flourishing India. But this will become a reality only if there are people courageous enough to shoulder this great national burden.

At the beginning of the twentieth century India's freedom movement was in full swing. One wing of this movement was led by the Muslim '*ulama*', while another by Subhash Chandra Bose. There was, however, one common factor: both were of the view that their goal would be fulfilled by means of military power. Both envisaged violent solutions to the problem. The only difference was that in seeking help from abroad the '*ulama*' turned to Turkey and Afghanistan, whereas Subhash Chandra Bose turned to Japan and Germany.

At all events, both parties' revolutionary activities proved ineffective in the face of the extraordinary military power of the British empire.

It was at this historic juncture, in 1919, that Mahatma Gandhi emerged on the political scene in India. Where others had looked at the circumstances only on a superficial level, Mahatma Gandhi looked below the surface to the hidden potential of the people. The success with which he nurtured that potential is greatly to his credit.

During his stay in Europe and Africa, Mahatma Gandhi studied modern political ideas. He came to appreciate the emergence of nationalism as a new force in a new age. In terms of western political thought, it was accepted that every nation should enjoy the unconditional right to self-rule. Mahatma Gandhi, understanding the power of this new wave, exploited it to the full on his return to India.

After joining the Congress, Mahatma Gandhi announced that he proposed to collect one crore of rupees for the party funds, for which purpose he intended to tour the entire country over a period of two months. Seth Chhotani, a wealthy cotton merchant of Bombay, told him that he need not spend two months touring the country, for, he was prepared to give him one crore of rupees there and then. But Mahatma Gandhi refused his offer. He replied, 'I have to meet the Indian people. Collecting one crore of rupees is only an excuse.'

The truth is that Mahatma Gandhi wanted to mobilize the Indian *janata* throughout the entire country in the name of freedom. To this end, in spite of apparent differences, he forged an alliance with the Khilafat

movement. His campaign was a success, for the whole of India awakened as one nation, a process which ultimately fructified on August 15, 1947.

Before the peaceful national movement launched by Mahatma Gandhi, it was by means of weapons that these Indian leaders had been combating the British, who had all the military resources of the Empire at their command. Clearly, in any encounter between the two, the British would gain supremacy. But, by awakening nationalist sentiments, Mahatma Gandhi was able to pit crores of Indians against a few lakhs of Englishmen. If in previous encounters, the British had always had the upper hand, it was now the time of the Indians. In this new kind of confrontation, the Indians stood to gain a clear victory, for they were possessed of a great, new strength which rendered their foreign rulers helpless. Finally the British were compelled to leave India.

Again, as we enter a new era in India, matters are coming to a head. Great changes have taken place, but many, unable to grasp their nature, continue to take their inspiration from the phraseology of the past. They remain preoccupied with the debris of an age gone by, simply because it is still there on the surface, while the potential of the new age remains hidden below. We again need a Gandhian eye which can look below the surface to the inner, deeper currents, so that they may be exploited to the full.

December 6, 1994, draws the line of demarcation between the new age and the old. Prior to this date, India's two biggest communities, Hindus and Muslims, walked the path of confrontation. In the last stages, this confrontation came to be symbolized by Ayodhya.

The Hindus were bent on 'building their Ram Mandir there. The slogan, "We will build the mandir on that very spot!" could be heard all around. Muslims, for their part, misguided by incompetent, so-called leaders, saw Ayodhya's Babri Masjid as a symbol of the community's prestige, rather as a symbol of the life and death of Islam itself. Both sides launched fiery movements. If, on the one hand, the Rath Yatra was in full swing, on the other, rallies and marches were the order of the day. However, these movements on either side yielded no fruitful results. The saying that processions generate more heat than light proved true in this instance.

As we all know, the result of such politics were the demolition of the historic Babri Mosque of Ayodhya on December 6, 1992, by a group of agitated Hindus. Immediately thereafter the rubble of the ancient building was completely removed to allow for the construction of a makeshift mandir. Idols having been promptly set up therein, worship has been regularly performed there since the demolition.

When this incident took place on December 6, it was looked upon by the people as just a beginning. They feared that now an unending series of destructive acts would be set in motion in India. But, as is generally known, this did not take place. After the tragedy of December 6, the writer suggested that from that point onwards, both the communities should show their willingness to end their agitation. The formula he proposed was that the Muslims should drop their agitation over the Babri Masjid, while the Hindus should, once and for all, strike off the other targeted mosques from their agenda.

Looked at as a ground reality, this is exactly what the status quo is today. On the one hand, the Muslims have fallen silent over the matter of the Babri Masjid and, on the other, the Hindus have now dropped the question of the other mosques. Even the very party which had taken up the cause of 'demolishing mosques and building mandirs' has itself announced its abandonment of the mandir-masjid issue and its determination henceforth to give its full attention to social reform.

At present, certain defeated leaders on both sides occasionally publish statements in newspapers or stage *dhamas* by small groups of people outside government buildings. This supposedly shows that the mandir-masjid issue is still alive, but smacks more of futile attempts to prove that they themselves still exist as leaders. In any case, all such action has proved counterproductive for both communities, for, despite all efforts, neither Hindus nor Muslims have been mobilized to take this issue once again to the streets.

The truth is that destruction has its limits, and once those limits have been reached, the will to destroy simply evaporates. What is truly self-perpetuating in this world is construction not destruction. This is a law of nature which, after December 6, made itself fully manifest in our country. Now the masses on both sides have realized that their actual problems are unrelated to the issues of the mandir and the masjid, and that raising them once again, on the plea that the historical record must be set straight, would only magnify the very real difficulties with which they are beset. It would in no way produce solutions to their problems.

What are the real issues? They concern peace throughout the land, justice for all, equitable job opportunities and social uplift on constructive lines, perhaps the greatest issue is the economic progress of the entire country, so that it may stand on an equal footing with the developed nations of the world. For this, we need a new multi-cultural ethos.

This alone will enable us to shake off the detritus of the past, to rid our thinking of tangential irrelevancies, and get straight to the heart of the matter, namely, the exploitation of our natural potential to the full.

Today, circumstances are entirely conducive to the construction of the country anew. Hostilities in Assam and Punjab have almost come to an end, and the separatist movement of Kashmir is at its last gasp. As a result of the liberalisation policy of today's government India is re-establishing itself on the international map. Recent elections have shown that the Indian voter is no longer prone to being deceived by slogans. He will attach importance not to emotional slogans, but to real issue. The communal riots between Hindus and Muslims – continuing since Partition – have now been buried in Ayodhya forever.

All this speaks of revolutionary changes. Now a new India is emerging on the subcontinent, a process which, once having set in, deserves to have the loyal and energetic support of all parties, so that it may culminate in a manner beneficial not just to one group, but to the entire nation.

God's Guarantee

Whenever any Prophet has endeavoured to propagate God's religion, he has had to suffer attempts by his own people to harm him. This happened even to the Prophet of Islam. When he invited his people to believe in the one God, they turned on him and became his enemies. In Mecca he suffered at their hands along with his companions, and, even in Medina, stiff opposition continued. However, God gave him His reassurance in the following verse of the Qur'an: 'Apostle, proclaim what is revealed to you by your Lord, if you do not, you will not have conveyed His message. God will protect you from all men. He does not guide the unbelievers' (5:67).

Calling people to Islam is a divine mission, and is carried out to fulfill the divine scheme (4:165). It is, therefore, natural that God should assist in this endeavour. It is such a difficult task that not receiving divine help would be more surprising than receiving it.

The responsibility for carrying on the work of *da'wah* after the Prophet rests with the Muslims. It is as his followers that they shall have to carry on what he accomplished in his lifetime (22:78). With this extension of responsibility, it is only proper that there should be an extension of their rights also. God has, therefore, said in the Qur'an that all those who follow the Prophet in this regard will be protected by Him from their enemies.

'O Prophet, God is sufficient for you and the faithful who follow you' (8:64).

Two interpretations have been placed on this verse. The second is that God is sufficient for you and for those who have obeyed you (*Al-Tafsir al-Mazhari*, 4:110).

Such support for the faithful has been variously described in different parts of the Qur'an.

A Sunnah

For the Muslims, the tradition laid down by the Prophet is the perfect example to follow, for it covers every aspect of life, be it a trivial, personal matter, or a larger issue, like jihad, which could affect the whole community, whether at that time or a thousand years later.

There are two broad divisions of Sunnah. One of these pertains to the form that a practice should take. For instance, the Prophet said, 'Say your prayers in the manner that you see me pray' (*Mishkat al-Masabih*, 1/215). This tradition relates to the form that *Salah* was to take. The companions observed the Prophet performing *Salah* and did likewise. Those who saw the companions praying offered their prayers in the same fashion and this example was followed meticulously from generation to generation. The form our prayers take today is identical to that practised by the Prophet.

The same is true of the rites of Hajj. On the occasion of the *Hajjat al wida* 'The last pilgrimage', the Prophet mounted his camel and performed the rites of Hajj so that others could observe their correct enactment. He said, 'O people, observe my performance of Hajj and perform your rites accordingly.'

Traditions of this nature refer to the form of an act. The creation of this form ensured that an act would be performed exactly in accordance with the example set by the Prophet. These may be called the traditions of form. There is another set of traditions which concern themselves with the spirit of an act. According to this tradition, the outer manifestation is relative, while the spirit is the reality. And in this, it is the spirit which is the more important.

The Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet over a period of 23 years. As and when a portion of the Qur'an was revealed, the Prophet would summon a scribe to whom he would dictate the verses. A *katib* (scribe) was in constant attendance. In all, there were over 40 such persons. The Prophet was so particular about this that even on such a perilous journey as his emigration from Mecca to Medina, he kept pen and paper with him and had a scribe (Abu Bake) accompany him.

The entire Qur'an was written on paper and other materials used for the purpose during the lifetime of the Prophet. Many of the companions, such as Zaid bin Thabit Ansari, committed the whole of the Qur'an to memory. Towards the end of his life, the Prophet recited the whole of the Qur'an in its proper sequence in the presence of a large number of the companions. This has been called Last Recitation in the books of traditions.

At the time of the Prophet's death, the Qur'an was safe either in the hearts of the people, or written on separate pages and tablets. The Prophet, in spite of all the care he took over having every single verses of the Qur'an written down never had the separate parts compiled in book form, as would be done today.

The Prophet was certainly aware of the fact that doubts would later arise over the compilation of the Book of God. Orientalists have tried to sow the seeds of doubt on this issue and, in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* compiled by them, have offered different explanations. One theory is that the Prophet of Islam, feeling that the Day of judgement was near, and that the world would soon come to an end, never entertained the idea of compiling the Qur'an in book form.

The non-compilation of the Qur'an by the Prophet was not an act of omission. This was something which, in spite of the obvious risks, he purposely left undone. This was because there was an inherent religious advantage in so doing. While the mission of the Prophet was to make the faith complete, therefore, it was just not possible for him to leave a religious task incomplete in any way.

If the Prophet had had the Qur'an compiled in book form and copies of it placed in the different mosques, it could easily have become neglected in essence, while Muslims busied themselves with the purely ritual matters pertaining to its physical presence. By leaving the work of compilation to his followers the, Prophet ensured that they gave their full attention to the spirit of the Qur'an.

The annals of history show that during the rule of Abu Bakr, in 12 Hijra, a battle was fought at Yamamah in Arabia, in which 70 Hafiz (Muslims who know the entire Qur'an by heart) were martyred. This caused great concern to Umar, who thought that if the *huffaz* were to be martyred in such great numbers, the content of the Qur'an would soon be lost to posterity. He expressed his fears to Abu Bakr, who then had the work of compilation carried out.

This was not an easy task. First of all, the Caliph was worried about the propriety of his doing something which the Prophet had never himself undertaken. He agreed only after a great deal of deliberation. This generated unprecedented activity with Umar and Zaid sitting at the entrance to the mosque and asking everyone who came there to hand over any written portion of the Qur'an which they had in their possession.

Zaid bin Thabit Ansari, who was placed in charge of this great operation on account of his talents and general ability, read all of the collected materials and cross-checked it with his memory. This was the first time in history that a book had been subjected to such thorough double-checking. This was understandably a very difficult task for Zaid ibn Thabit, who said: "By God, if Abu Bakr had ordered me to move a mountain from its place, that would not have been more difficult than the task he has given me of compiling the Qur'an.

After this eventful compilation of the Qur'an, full details of which have been recorded in the annals of history, the question arose as to what was to be done with the material originally collected. After due deliberation, it was decided to destroy it all by burning. This entire operation became a rigorous discipline for Muslims after the Prophet's death. During this period they learnt a great deal more about their religion, in a sense, rediscovering the Qur'an by dint of sheer hard work and intelligent investigation. This caused their bonds with their religion to become reinforced, and with this, came the realization that the Qur'an was not a book to be blindly followed.

The tradition which I call the *sunnah* of spirit – that of creating better understanding – is one of the traditions of the Prophet. Like the other traditions of the Prophet, its continuance as a permanent feature of the Islamic life is highly desirable. It is a tradition of prime importance because it has an inspiring effect on the followers of Muhammad, may peace be upon him. It is a powerful tool to keep them alive and active.

This can be illustrated by another example. The Qur'an says that God made His revelations therein in order to warn the people (25:1). As is well known, the Qur'an was originally written in Arabic, whereas thousands of languages are currently being used. How then is it possible to warn all the different communities through the Arabic of the Qur'an?

If God had desired all communities to be directly instructed by means of the Qur'an He would have revealed it in some international language. But this did not happen. This in itself indicates that God desired the faithful to undertake the work of translation so that other communities would be able to understand the Holy Scriptures.

This is clearly one of the 'traditions of spirit' of the Prophet. Now, the need of the hour is to put this tradition into practice. One way of doing this would be to utilize the modern press and other media to disseminate translations of the message of the Qur'an in simple language. If our leaders had revived this tradition and inspired Muslims to become engaged in translating the Qur'an into different languages, the entire community could already have been fruitfully occupied in this venture. In this way, Muslims would have rediscovered Islam all over again, albeit in the light of modern circumstances. The Qur'an would have caused a religious revolution in their lives. On the contrary, however, in the absence of timely leadership, the whole community is foundering on the rock of politics, thus depriving themselves of both religion and the world.

Patience for Paradise

It is related that in the early days of Islam, the Prophet was once passing in the vicinity of Yasir and his family in Mecca when they were being subjected to the violence of the Quraysh. When Yasir set eyes on the Prophet, the only question he asked him was, 'O Prophet of God, is this all there is to the world?' The Prophet replied, 'O family of Yasir, be patient, for you have been promised heaven' (Ibn Kathir, *As-Sirah an-Nabawiyah*, Vol. 1, p. 494). Yasir and his wife Summaiyyah were the first to succumb to persecution by the Quraysh. Yet, even after seeing the painful fate which his parents had suffered, 'Ammar, their son, being strong of will, did not flinch from his faith. It is said that 'Ammar ibn Yasir was the first Meccan Muslim to have built a mosque in his home. It is believed that it is he who is referred to in this verse of the Qur'an (Ibn Sa'd, *At-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, Vol. 3, p. 250):

Can he who passes his night in adoration, standing up or on his knees, who dreads the terrors of the life to come and hopes to earn the mercy of his Lord, be compared to the unbeliever? ... Truly, none will take heed but men of understanding (Qur'an, 39:9).

A Page of History

Muslim rule in Spain lasted for about eight hundred years, ending in 1492. Even at the time of their political decline, the Muslims were in all respects far ahead of their Spanish Christian subjects. Yet the Christians ultimately gained the upper hand. The main reason for this was Muslim disunity in the face of Christian unity. While the Christians had greatly increased their strength by uniting themselves, the Muslims had allowed themselves to be considerably weakened by ever increasing differences.

Even during the heyday of Muslim rule, a comparatively small area of Spain remained in the political possession of the Christians. Using this territory as their political centre, the Christians continued to engage in activities against Muslim rule by taking advantage of the Muslims' internal differences. During the latter days of Muslim rule, the Christians considerably expanded their territory, and the Muslims were left with only Granada.

Abul Hasan, one of the leading Muslims of the last days, received a demand from Ferdinand II that he pay tribute to him. Abul Hasan being a brave king, wrote back to Ferdinand:

"These days the mint of Granada is turning out not gold coins but iron swords to sever the necks of Christians." Afterwards many armed clashes took place between the two forces. Finally at Losha, in 887, Ferdinand's army was routed in a heavy encounter with the army of Sultan Abul Hasan.

Ferdinand then began to re-deploy his forces. At that time, there were two Christian kingdoms in Spain, one at Aragon under Ferdinand, and another at Castile ruled by Queen Isabella I. Ferdinand showed great foresight in persuading Isabella to marry him. Through this marriage in 1469, a greater Christian kingdom came into being.

While on the one hand, this event of alliance took place in the Christian world, on the other, in Muslim Spain, Sultan Abul Hasan's own son, Abu Abdullah Mohammad, revolted against him capturing a part of Granada. Sultan Abul Hasan was now left to rule a territory of just four thousand square meters, whereas, by means of a marital alliance, Ferdinand had expanded his empire to 1,25000 square meters. All these events proved so shocking to Sultan Abul Hasan, that he had an attack of paralysis after which he lost his sight.

After this series of tragic incidents, Sultan Abul Hasan abdicated the throne, appointing his brother Abu Abdullah Zughal in his place. However, a plot was soon hatched to remove him from the throne. With his removal Abu Abdullah Mohammad came to be the sole ruler of Granada. But he was not the equal of his father in wisdom and, in just a few encounters, he was defeated by the Christian forces.

In the last stage, the Christian forces surrounded the fort of Granada. Abdullah, who was bold enough in his encounters with his father and uncle, proved a coward in encounters with Christian forces. Finally, he

signed the papers of his abdication from Granada and its fort on January 3, 1942. These were countersigned by the victor, Ferdinand.

Recording this happening in Spain a historian writes: "The last ruler of Granada, Sultan Abul Hasan, defeated Ferdinand I (1462-1516) and Queen Isabella, but his own son, Abu Abdullah, led a coup against his father which resulted in the downfall of his father."

Internal unity is the greatest strength in this world, just as disunity is the greatest weakness. Undoubtedly, this is the greatest lesson of history.

Glad Tidings

Ibn Ishaq, the Prophet's biographer, writes that when the Prophet began to communicate the message of Islam to Meccans publicly, he had to face stiff opposition and hardship.

His wife, Khadijah bint Khuwailid, converted to the new faith without a moment's hesitation. Thus far the partner of his life, she now became a partner in his suffering, for the Prophet's adversaries found many ways of torturing them, not the least of which was to assemble before their house and create an uproar.

It was under these circumstances that one day the Angel Gabriel came to their house and asked the Messenger of God to convey to Khadija greetings from her Lord. Then Gabriel told the Prophet that he had been ordained by God to give glad tidings to Khadija about a house made of pearls (in heaven) where there was neither din nor suffering.

These were glad tidings for Khadija in particular and a lesson for the believers in general. It was news of success in advance for Khadija and guidance towards success for the believers.

In this world the faithful have to suffer at the hands of the arrogant. They have to live under great provocation. In a situation like this the faithful are ill-advised to quarrel with them. They should ignore the provocation, and turn their attention towards the Hereafter. They should pray, O Lord, grant us the patience to face this unpleasantness. Build us a house in Paradise where there is neither noise nor suffering.

When a believer calls upon worshippers of heroes and religious personalities to stop revering mere mortals and, instead, to give their love and worship to God and God alone – for only He is deserving of such love and worship – they become enraged with him and oppose him with all their might. When he calls upon his fellow-men to act purely to please God, they become antagonised and start harassing him. Yet, in the face of such hostility, he remains patient, for he has God's promise of a heavenly abode in the Hereafter, which will be completely free of noise and suffering. It will be a place where he can live in spiritual bliss for ever after.

Looking to the Future

In the early stages of modern civilization the Arabs contributed a great deal to practical science. For instance, it was the Arabs who made useable watches in the seventh century. In his *Discovery of India*, Jawahar Lal Nehru has acknowledged that 'Damascus had a famous clock and so did the Baghdad of Harun al-Rashid's day.' (p. 261)

Although the manufacture of watches was first engaged in by Muslims, the progress and development of this industry took place entirely in Europe. Today, millions of dollars are being sent by Muslims to the western world for the purchase of watches.

The same is the case with all other modern industrial enterprises. They were given their first impetus by the Muslims, but were subsequently developed by the West, because the Muslims had become so embroiled in mutual strife that they could not give their full attention to industrial progress. The West thus came to dominate the industrial scene throughout the entire world.

There are many Muslims who take a pride in their past. But there is no one to encourage them to engage themselves in the tasks in which they formerly excelled. Simply taking a pride in the past can never be a substitute for taking effective action in the present.

Before the invention of the steamship, Muslims were masters of navigation. In the words of a historian, they had converted the Mediterranean into an Arab lake. But today, in the age of the steamship, the Muslims have no shipping company. For them, this has become an age of decline and decadence, the reason being that Muslims have lost the ability to learn new things or to embark on original investigation.

Remaining attached in all matters to what is old has come to be regarded by Muslims as religiosity, while associating with anything modern is tantamount to apostasy. So far as matters of religion – beliefs, forms of worship, moral values – are concerned, we have undoubtedly to look back. But so far as matters of the world are concerned, we have to look forward. Muslims have never been able to understand this difference, and that is why they have become a backward community in this modern age.

17 August-September 1994

ISLAM: CREATOR OF THE MODERN AGE

By Maulana Wahiduddin Khan

Antiquity was an age of superstition: the present age is of science. Before reaching its present-day zenith, the modern, scientific age had to pass through three stages. The first was marked by the eradication of the superstitious mentality, the second saw the practical beginnings of scientific research; the third is the spectacular culmination of the scientific process in the second half of the twentieth century. The present volume examines the Islamic contribution to the completion of the first two stages during the millennium immediately following upon the emergence of Islam.

A Matter of Wisdom

The Prophet Ayub (Job) described in the Qur'an in brief, and in the Bible in detail, was born several hundred years before Jesus Christ in the plains stretching from Syria to Palestine. In the Bible, his place of birth is called Uz.

According to the Bible he possessed seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, five hundred she-asses, and a very great household; so that this man was the greatest of all the men of the east.

After some time, such misfortunes befell him as left him impoverished yet Job was the epitome of patience. In the words of the Bible. "...Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped. And said, 'Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken, blessed be the name of the Lord.'" (Job 1:20-21)

Then again the circumstances changed after some years. Job again came to possess all kinds of wealth and resources, even more than he had before. According to the Bible:

The Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning; for he had fourteen thousand sheep, and six thousand camels, and a thousand she-asses. (Job 42:12)

The Qur'an ended the tale with:

We restored to him his people and as many more with them: a blessing from Ourself and an admonition to prudent men. (38:43)

Although only given very brief mention in the Qur'an this incident makes the very important and lesson giving point that one should never despair when afflicted by misfortune or loss in life. God, being All-merciful, has devised the system of this world in such a way that here no loss or deprival is final. Here, one can always overcome one's misfortunes and be the gainer once again provided one remains patient and perseveres in one's struggles, never losing hope of God's succour.

The Fear of God

Plato (428-348 BC) is regarded as one of the three great philosophers of ancient Greece, the other two being Socrates and Aristotle. The book for which Plato is best remembered, titled the *Republic* and written in the form of a dialogue, is on the subject of the Ideal State. In Plato's view "Unless philosophers bear kingly rule ... or those who are now called Kings and princes become genuine and adequate philosophers, there will be no respite from evil."

Throughout the ages, many individuals, who have come to be known as philosopher-Kings (or queens) have assumed power, e.g. the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius, the Russian Queen Catherine II, King Frederick II of Prussia, the Macedonia King Demetrius and the contemporary ruler of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yen. But none has measured up to the standard of the good ruler as presented by Plato.

There were certain pupils of the Greek philosophers who attained to kingship. For example, Alexander the Great was taught by Aristotle, and Demetrius was trained in Aristotle's school of thought. Yet these philosopher-rulers were no better than others. As Peter Green puts it: "What happened was, nothing happened ... Power, it appeared, could corrupt even philosophers. (*Time Magazines*, May 13, 1991)

According to Karl Marx's theory, the root of all evil was the economic system based on ownership, according to which those who were owners exploited those who were not, in very much the same way as a despot would oppress his subjects. It was thought that if the system of individual ownership were to be replaced by that of collective ownership, all kinds of oppression and exploitation could be uprooted. There would then be neither the owner or the owned, and no group or individual would be able to exploit any other group or individual.

These ideas led to the Marxist revolution in Russia in 1917, whereupon the system of state-ownership was introduced by force. However, as events unfolded, it became apparent that in the guise of the no-ownership system, this had become the most tyrannical regime in modern history, the rulers proving to be the most oppressive and dictatorial ever witnessed. Instead of collective ownership improving the lot of the underprivileged, it only encouraged further oppression and coerciveness on the part of the rulers.

Similarly, in the second half of the twentieth century, colonialism was branded as an evil, and independence movements were launched against it on a massive scale. The moving spirits behind these movements held that foreign rule was the cause of all evils, not the least being oppression, and that if it could be replaced by home rule, oppression would die a natural death. These movements for national freedom eventually proved a resounding success and in all the newly freed former colonies Government

posts were promptly secured by the sons of the soil. But oppression and evil did not disappear. Hence rulers continued to be tyrants. It was only power that had changed hands.

God's religion Islam tells us that all such claims made for improved temporal systems are without foundation; the only factor that can effect true reform is the fear of God. Nothing else can hold a man in power to the observance of proper standards of truth and justice.

The best historical illustration of this theory is the conduct of the Prophet's companions. They wielded power, but they remained untarnished by the corruption rampant among the rulers who came before and after them. Their probity was unparalleled; as such it was a living proof of the Islamic claim that only the fear of God will right the wrongs of this world.

Action, Not Reaction

Several years ago, IBM, the famous American Computer Company, was already so far ahead in the field of computers that its officers, making fun of Japanese Computer Companies, had quipped: 'When IBM sneezes, Japanese computer makers are blown away.'

Japanese industrialists, however, did not express any anger at this 'provocation'. They rather devoted themselves to upgrading the standard of their computers, until a time came when Japan had achieved the topmost rank in the world in the computer industry. Today Fujitsu, a Japanese computer company, said its largest new computer can perform up to 600 million instructions per second, compared with as many as 210 MIPS for IBM's best. (*Time Magazine*, September 17, 1990).

Reacting to provocation brings nothing but negative results, whereas avoiding provocation leaves the way clear to embark on planned construction and consolidation. It is the law of this world that those who 'act' make progress, while those who 'react' are doomed to destruction. This applies particularly to the behaviour of Muslims at the present time. For example if a Hindu says anything against Muslims, all our so-called Muslim leaders and our third class journalists will start protesting that Muslims' sentiments are being hurt and that the administration, being unconcerned, has failed to discharge its duties. The Muslim public will then allow itself to be provoked into launching an agitation. What else can this result in but communal rioting? There is nothing more calculated to do a disservice to the Muslim community than this, for the final outcome will simply be that Muslims are left further behind than ever.

Superior Solutions

Thinking is an incomprehensibly strange art of our world. A number of books have appeared on this subject which as well as adding to human knowledge, have increased our sense of wonder.

Here are the titles of some of these books:

Towards a Theory of Thinking, Dr. Rapaport, (1951)

The Psychology of Thinking, W.E. Vinacke, (1952)

Thinking, F.C. Bartlett, (1958)

Productive Thinking, Max Wertheimer (1959)

The research on which these books are based has brought to light much new information on the brain. One fact which has emerged is that a very important process takes place within the human mind which the psychologist call 'brain-storming'.

A process called brainstorming has been offered as a method of facilitating the production of new solutions to problems ... These unrestricted suggestions increase the probability that at least some superior solutions will emerge.

(Encyclopaedia Britannica, 19/357)

Researchers tell us that when a human being is facing a crisis situation, latent capabilities are aroused which enable him to engage in this process of brainstorming. This in turn enables him to discover a superior solution to the problem facing him. Success then follows as surely as night follows day.

This is one of God's great mysteries – how he has made our difficulties the ladders to our success.

The Blessings of Paradise

Ukaydar ibn Abdul Malik Al-Kindi (d. 12 ^{AH}) was a Christian ruler of Daumat-ul Jandal. During the Tabuk campaign, when the Prophet was camping near his State, he visited him and embraced Islam. However, after the death of the Prophet he recanted. Later he was killed in a battle led by Khalid ibn Walid during the reign of the first Caliph, Abu Bakr.

It is recorded in history books that when Ukaydar came to see the Prophet, he was dressed in royal apparel. Anas ibn Malik, a Companion of the Prophet, says:

I saw Ukaydar's long gown when he came to the Prophet. Muslims began to touch his *qaba* in wonder. Then the Prophet said: "Are you wonderstruck at his apparel? By God, there is no doubt about it that even his handkerchiefs of Sa'd ibn Muadh will be of better quality than these clothes."

(*Al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah*, Vol. 17/5).

Just as the Prophethood of the Prophet Muhammad is for all time, so are his words. These words of his do not refer just to that particular ruler belonging to the first century of Hijrah, but to all the worldly things whose apparent glitter makes people envy them.

The truth is that all the worldly things which appear very pleasing and attractive to people cannot compare with the splendours of paradise, which will give them far greater pleasure and comfort. Only in paradise will man understand that what he had failed to find in the world he left behind was of no significance. And that what he has found in paradise is far better than all the mere things of this world.

The Quest for Knowledge

According to a tradition, the Prophet of Islam once remarked: "The remedy for ignorance is asking questions." If the ignorant man does not inquire, his ignorance will stay with him. But if he has a questioning mind, some knowledgeable person will answer him, and he will no longer remain ignorant.

There is a saying in Arabic to the same effect: To know that you do not know is half knowledge itself. If an ignorant person is not aware of his ignorance, he will continue to remain in the same state. But when he becomes aware of his ignorance, he sets about seeking for knowledge. He will try to turn his ignorance into knowledge. In this way his awareness of his ignorance will become the stepping stone leading towards full knowledge.

This is called in present-day parlance, the spirit of inquiry, and is given great importance. It is this spirit of inquiry which has played the greatest role in bringing about the age of science. It is the zeal to discover which has led man to knowledge.

In ancient times the phenomena of nature were considered to be manifestations of God. The sight of the manifestations of nature, therefore, aroused in man the spirit of worship. It was only when these natural phenomena were divested of their divinity that the spirit of inquiry could be aroused in man. As a result, many of the mysteries of nature now lie unravelled.

An inquisitive mind is the stepping stone to all knowledge. Only those who are possessed of this quality will achieve great success in intellectual and academic fields. Those devoid of this spirit will remain static, and will fail to climb to the top of the ladder of success.

It is this spirit which is the foundation of all scientific progress.

Position of Woman in Shari'ah – 5

IN THE FIELD OF ACTION

The general lot of women in the early days of Islam was frequently a hard one, but they bore themselves with remarkable fortitude and adapted themselves to whatever conditions they found themselves in. One shining example is that of Abu Bakr's daughter Asma', who was born 27 years before the Emigration. When she accepted Islam in Mecca, the Muslims were just 17 in number.

When Abu Bakr emigrated to Medina, he possessed 6000 *dirhams*, all of which he took with him. When his father, Abu Qahafa, heard of this, he came to his family to console them and said, "I think that Abu Bakr has not only given us a shock by leaving you alone, but I suppose he has also taken all the money with him." Asma' then told her grandfather that he had left them well provided for. She thereupon collected some small stones and with them she filled up the niche where Abu Bakr had formerly kept his money. She covered the pile of stones with a cloth and then placed her grandfather's hand on it. Having gone blind in his old age, he was easily taken in by this trick, and thought that the niche was full of *dirhams*. "It is a good thing that Abu Bakr has done. This will suffice for your necessities." Asma' then confessed that her father had not left them a single *dirham* and that it was only to comfort her grandfather that she had conceived of this idea.¹

1. Thn Kathir, *As-Sirah an-Nabawiyyah*, 2/236.

Before the advent of Islam, Asma's father had been one of the richest merchants of Mecca, but when Asma' emigrated to Medina with her husband, Zubayr, they had to live in the harshest of conditions. Bukhari has recorded Asma's account of how her own existence was eked out from day to day:

When I married Zubayr, he had neither wealth nor property, nor anything else. He had no servant, and there was only one camel to bring water and only one horse. I myself brought the grass for the camel and crushed date stones for it to eat instead of grain. I had to fetch the water myself, and when the water bag burst I would sew it up myself. As well as managing the house, I had also to take care of the horse. This I found the most difficult of all. I did not know how to cook the bread properly, so whenever I had to make it, I would knead the flour and take it to the Ansar women in the neighbourhood. They were very sincere women and they would cook my bread along with their own. When Zubayr reached Medina, the Prophet gave him a piece of land which was two miles away from the city. I used to work on this land, and on the way back home I would carry a sack of date stones on my head.

One day, when I was returning like this with a sack on my head, I saw the Prophet mounted on a camel going along the road with a group of Medinan Muslims. When he saw me, he

reined in his camel and signed to me to sit on it, but I felt shy of travelling with men, and I also thought that Zubayr might take offence at this, as he was very sensitive about his honor. The Prophet, realizing that I was hesitant, did not insist, and went on his way.

When I came home, I told Zubayr the whole story. I said that I had felt shy of sitting with the men on the camel and that I had also remembered his sense of honor. To this Zubayr replied, "By God, your carrying date stones home on your head is harder for me to bear than that."¹

1. Bukhari, *Sahih, Kitab an-Nikah, (Fath al-Bari, 9/264-265)*.

Such instances of how women toiled during their stay in Medina are numberless. At that time women worked not only in their homes, but outside as well. This was because their menfolk were so preoccupied with preaching Islam that there was little time left in which to discharge their household responsibilities. It was left to the women then to deal with both internal and external duties. They even tended the animals, did the farming and worked in the orchards.

THE VIRTUE OF BELIEVING WOMEN

When this verse was revealed in the Qur'an – "They who hoard up gold and silver and spend it not in the way of God, unto them give tidings of a painful doom"² – then the Prophet said: "Woe to gold, woe to silver." When the Companions of the Prophet learned of this they were upset. They began to ask one another what things they were going to store then. At that time 'Umar ibn al-Khattab was with them. 'Umar said, if they liked, he could put this matter to the Prophet. Everyone agreed, so 'Umar went to the Prophet and said, "The Companions are saying, 'Could we but learn which kind of wealth is better, we would store that and no other.' The Prophet said: 'Everyone should possess a tongue which remembers God, a heart that thanks God and a wife that helps him in his faith.'"³ Another version has used the word "Hereafter" for faith.

2. Qur'an, 9:34.
3. Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir, II/352*.

WOMEN IN EVERY FIELD

Once Umm Salmah was having her hair combed when she heard the sermon starting in the mosque. The Prophet began with the words, "O people ..." On hearing this she told the woman who was combing her hair to braid it just as it was. The woman asked her why she was in such a hurry. Umm Salmah replied, "Are we not counted among 'people'?" And so saying, she promptly braided her hair herself, went to the corner of the house nearest the mosque and listened to the sermon.

In all, Umm Salmah related 378 traditions and used to lay down laws. Ibn Qayyim writes that if her decrees were to be compiled, they would take up a whole book.

Out of all the Prophet's wives, 'Aishah was the most intelligent. About 2210 traditions of the Prophet were related by her, and these were passed on by about one hundred of the Prophet's Companions and their close associates. Among her pupils were such eminent scholars as 'Urwah ibn Zubayr, Sa'id ibn Mussayyib, 'Abdullah ibn 'Amir, Maruq ibn Ajda', 'Ikramah and 'Alaqamah. A jurist of high calibre, she used to explain the wisdom and background of each tradition that she described. To take a very simple example, she explained that the prescribed bath on a Friday was not just a matter of ritual, as had been maintained by Abu Sa'id al-Khudri and 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar, but was meant as practical advice for people who had to travel from far-off places to say their Friday prayers in the Prophet's mosque.¹ While travelling, they perspired and became covered in dust: the Prophet had, therefore, told them to take a bath before attending prayers.²

1. Ibn Hajar al-'Athqalani, *Fath al-Bari fi Sharh al-Bukhari*, 2/284-288.

2. Bukhari, *Sahih, Kitab al-Jumu'a*, 2/307.

When the Prophet was preparing to set off for Khaybar to engage in *jihad*, some women of the Banu Ghifar tribe approached him and said, "O Prophet of God, we want to accompany you on this journey, so that we may tend the injured and help Muslims in every possible way." The Prophet replied, "May God bless you. You are welcome to come."³ Umm 'Atiyah, a Medinan woman, said that she had been present on seven expeditions: "I looked after the emigrants, cooked their food, bound up the wounds of the injured and" cared for those who were in distress."

3. Ibn Sa'd, *Tabaqat al-Kubra*, 8/292.

During the battle with the Jews in Medina, the Muslim women and children were gathered on the roof of a fort with Hassan ibn Thabit as their guard. Safia, the daughter of Abdul Muttalib, who was also present on the roof, describes how she saw a passing Jew taking a round of the fort: "At that time the Banu Qurayza (a Jewish tribe) were doing battle with the Muslims, which is why the road between us and the Prophet was cut off, and there was no one to defend us from the Jews. The Prophet and all his Companions, being on the battlefield, were in no position to come to our assistance. In the meanwhile, the Jew was coming nearer to the fort, and I said, 'O Hassan, look! This Jew who is walking all around our fort is a danger to us, because he might go and inform the Jews of the insecure position we are in. The Prophet and his Companions are in the thick of battle, so it is your duty to go down and kill him.' But Hassan replied, 'By God, you know I am not fit for such a task.'"

"At this, she tied a cloth round her waist, picked up a stick, went down to the outside of the fort and beat the man to death. "This done, I came back inside the fort and asked Hassan ibn Thabit to bring the

things the Jew had on him, as I, a woman, did not want to touch him. Hassan ibn Thabit replied, 'Daughter of Abdul Muttalib, I have no need of his possessions.'¹

1. Ibn Kathir, *Al-Bidayah wa an-Nihayah*, 4/108-109.

THE SUCCOR OF GOD

In the sixth year of Hijrah, a 10-year peace treaty was concluded at al-Hudaybiyyah, one article of which specified that anyone emigrating to Muhammad's camp without the permission of his guardian would have to be returned to Mecca; whereas any Muslim emigrating from Muhammad's camp to Mecca would not have to be returned.² This was adhered to in the case of men, one notable instance was that of Suhayl ibn 'Amr's son, Abu Jandal, who in spite of having walked 13 miles from Mecca to al-Hudaybiyyah in a badly injured condition with his feet in shackles, was promptly returned to his persecutors. Similarly, other Muslims having managed to free themselves from Quraysh were returned one after another.³ This pact, however, was not regarded as covering the case of Muslim women. This verse of the Qur'an was revealed on this occasion:

2. Ibn Kathir, *As-Sirah an-Nabawiyah*, 3/321.

3. Ibid., 3/321-335.

Believers, when believing women seek refuge with you, test them. Allah best knows their faith. If you find them true believers, do not return them to the infidels.⁴

4. Qur'an, 60:10.

Many incidents have been recorded of women managing to free themselves from the clutches of the Quraysh, coming to Medina, and then not being returned to the Quraysh in spite of the latter invoking the terms of the peace treaty. For example, when Umm Kulthum bint 'Uqbah ibn Abu Mu'ayt escaped to Medina, she was not returned even when two of her brothers came to take her back.⁵ The Quraysh considered this refusal a violation of the pact and quickly seized this opportunity to defame the Prophet. It is remarkable, however, that they soon ceased to protest on this score and, considering that they were the Prophet's direst enemies, it is difficult to understand how this came about. No satisfactory answer is to be found in the books of *Sirah* and Commentaries on the Qur'an. Qadi Abu Bakr ibn al- 'Arabi writes that the Quraysh ceased to protest because God had miraculously silenced their tongues.⁶ There can be no doubt about it: it was one of God's miracles. (Although not in the usual sense of the word).

5. Ibn Hajar al-'Athqalani, *Fath al-Bari*, 7/366.

6. *Ahkam al-Qur'an*, Edited by 'Ali Muhammad al-Bajawi (Beirut, 1987), 4/1786.

It is perhaps easier to arrive at the truth by examining the wording of this particular condition of the pact. Here we quote Bukhari's version, which may be taken as the most authentic: "You will have to return any of our men who come to you, even if they have accepted your faith."¹ The expression "any of

our men" (*rajul*) obviously gave Muslims a loophole by which to exclude women from the application of this condition. This condition of the pact had not been put forward by them, but by the Meccans, and the actual wording had been dictated by the delegates of the Quraysh. It seems that when one of them, called Suhayl ibn 'Amr, was dictating, he was thinking of both men and women, but that the actual word he chose in order to convey "any person" (inclusive of both men and women) was *rajul*, which in Arabic is actually used only for men. Most probably this was why the Prophet could legitimately refuse – according to Imam Zuhri – to hand over Umm Kulthum bint 'Uqbah to her brothers when they came to him to demand her return. Razi is another annalist who records the Prophet on this occasion as having explained that "the condition applied to men and not to women."²

Thus God, by means of a single word, saved virtuous Muslim women from the humiliation of being returned to their oppressors.

1. Bukhari, *Sahih, Kitab ash-Shurut fi al-Jihad wa al-Musalah (Fath al-Bari, 5/ 262).*
2. Ibn Hajar al- 'Athqalani, *Fath al-Bari, 9/345.*

WORKING OUTDOORS

According to 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud, when Abu ad-Dahdah, one of the Prophet's Companions, heard the revelation of this Qur'anic verse: "Who will give a generous loan to God? He will pay him back two-fold and he shall receive a rich reward,"¹ he asked the Prophet, "O Messenger of God, does God want a loan from us?" When the Prophet replied in the affirmative, Abu ad-Dahdah took him by the hand, and said, "I hereby lend my orchard to God."

1. Qur'an, 57:11

Abu ad-Dahdah's orchard was a sizeable one with six hundred date palms and, at the time he donated it to the cause of Islam, his wife, Umm ad-Dahdah, was staying in it with her children. Never-theless, having made his pledge to the Prophet, Abu ad-Dahdah came to the orchard, called his wife and told her that she would have to leave, as it had been loaned to God. Umm ad-Dahdah's reaction was that he had made a good bargain. That is, that God would reward him many times over in the hereafter. So saying, she left the orchard with her children, taking with her all her bags and baggage.²

2. Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir, 4/308.*

From this incident we can gather that Umm ad-Dahdah worked on the date orchard. There are many such incidents in the early phase of Islam (the exemplary phase) which show that certainly women were not confined indoors. They went out in order to attend to many necessary outdoor duties. However, one point should be made clear: these outdoor activities of women were not engaged in entertainment but as a matter of necessity. They were meant to build up the family on proper lines and were in no sense intended to establish women's equality with men in the outside world.

WOMEN'S POSITION

The honorable position accorded by Islam to woman is symbolically demonstrated by the performance of the rite of *sa'i*, as an important part of the pilgrimage to Mecca, made at least once in a lifetime as a religious duty by all believers who can afford the journey. The rite of *sa'i* is performed by running back and forth seven times between Safa and Marwah, two hillocks near the Ka'bah. This running, enjoined upon every pilgrim, be they rich or poor, literate or illiterate, Kings or commoners, is in imitation of the desperate quest of Hajar (Hagar), Abraham's wife, for water to quench the thirst of her crying infant when they arrived in this dry desert country, four thousand years ago, at God's behest, long before there was any such city as Mecca. (God's aim in leading Abraham and his wife and child to this barren, inhospitable land was to bring into being a live community which, free of all superstitions and all other corruptions of civilization, would play a revolutionary role led by the last Prophet.) The performance of this rite is a lesson in struggling for the cause of God. It is of the utmost significance that, this was an act first performed by a woman. Perhaps there could be no better demonstration of a woman's greatness than God's command to men, literally to follow in her footsteps.